No. 272

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by KATHLEEN BLISS

30th October, 1946

NEWS-LETTER

The Universities

SUPPLEMENT

THE OBEDIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL

A. R. VIDLER

THE NAZI LEADERS have gone to their graves, but few thinking people will be able to believe that the spirit of Nazism is dead with them, still less that the sickness of society which gave these evil men their opportunity has been diagnosed and cured. The question, "Why did all this happen?" cannot be set aside as no longer of importance for anything but historical research: it is still a living issue.

THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITIES

In all the tragic history of Germany between the wars no feature is more bewildering than the capitulation of the German universities. Individuals protested, and in the later stages backed their protests with their lives, but the universities of Germany taken as a whole, showed an astonishing lack of perception of the meaning of the events taking place around them and an astounding docility in allowing themselves to be used as the instruments of Nazi policy. Moreover, these universities were not the fragile creations of a few years, but institutions with traditions stretching back into the middle ages and deeply respected for their learning, not only in Germany, but in all the other universities of the world.

The effect of this spectacular collapse has been to bring greater depth and more urgency into discussion about the universities.

The German universities were not able to act as an effective barrage against the tides which swept over the nation. But can we claim for the universities of the west that they are alive to what are the vital forces of our time, or give any guidance to the public mind, or even to the student mind, in wisdom and balanced judgment? Again, the German universities accepted from the Nazis a sense of purpose and mission in the life of the nation largely because they lacked a unifying purpose in their own life. The Soviet conception of the university takes it for granted that the purpose for which the university exists lies outside the university and is one with the purposes of the communist party and state. In the west such a doctrine of the purpose of the university is vociferously denied: the university must be free of all outwardly imposed ideologies and ends, free to live its own life and achieve its own inwardly created unity. Yet the contrast in the universities of the west between this idea and the actual state of affairs could scarcely be more marked. The universities profess to be communities of teachers and students united in a search for knowledge and truth: in actual fact there is scarcely a university in which those engaged in the different schools are in fruitful relationship with each other: the old unity of knowledge, or the belief that such a thing as a Truth about the whole system of things exists and can be found by human minds, has gone. The universities no longer help students to seek for ultimate certainties or guiding principles; rather they hand on to them an attitude of mind which indefinitely suspends judgment on all the main questions of life, leaving them to be debated and decided upon elsewhere, while students frequently become cynical window-dressers laying out their knowledge to catch the fancy of the examiner.

CHRISTIANS AND THE UNIVERSITY CRISIS

We devoted a long Supplement to this question of the universities (C.N-L. No. 253) and there is no need to go over again ground already covered there. The universities are caught not only in an organizational crisis, brought about by the pressure of new demands for trained personnel, but

in a crisis of belief about themselves and their function in society. If Christians are to do more than share in a general sense of malaise about the universities, some content has to be put into a suggestion made by Arnold Nash, author of *The University and the Modern World*[1] and quoted in the last paragraph of the Supplement, that what is needed is some kind of " order of Christian scholars " who are working to find a common point of view. Nothing so formal as the foundation of an order is likely to take place, but significant beginnings have been made. In a Federation Grey book, called *The Task of the Christian in the University*,[2] John Coleman, a Canadian member of the staff of the World Student Christian Federation, gives an able and readable summary of some recent attempts in many countries to think afresh about the function of the university, including the voluminous work of the Harvard enquiry and other less ambitious efforts of Christian groups, Roman Catholic and non-Roman in many countries.

In this country also a beginning has been made in drawing together Christian university teachers. Between thirty and forty Christian university teachers, varying in status from professors to junior lecturers in a wide range of subjects, and drawn from English, Scottish and Welsh universities, recently met for three days and tabled some of their concerns and laid their first plans for action. Thirty Christians cannot by themselves bring about radical changes, nor are they required to do so, for many people within the universities and a considerable number outside them are concerned. But Christians have the advantage of a common starting-point for discussion. What is required is that Christian insights should be brought to bear at points where they are most needed.

In order to get the matters with which they were concerned much more widely discussed, various members of this group have written pamphlets on different aspects of the problem. Each of the twelve pamphlets is an individual contribution, but what emerges in the series is a recognizably

[1] S.C.M. Press. 12s. 6d.
[2] World Student Christian Federation, 13 rue Calvin, Geneva.

coherent point of view.[1] The first in the series by Professor John Baillie analyses the present situation in the universities. Universities have ceased to be "closely integrated communities, inspired by a common purpose and cemented by certain common and firmly held convictions." Yet no man and no institution can live without a working basis of belief, and dogmas which are thrown out by the front door are replaced by others which creep unseen through the windows. Belief in human progress and in salvation by knowledge are the unacknowledged dogmas of many university teachers and objectivity and impartiality are the ideals which they most cherish.

Professor Hodges deals trenchantly with these dogmas in the second pamphlet in the series. No one is either objective or impartial. Every university teacher knows that at one level and makes allowance for it. But what is not widely understood is that knowledge is a source of power, increasing in importance in the modern world. The universities are trafficking in a commodity the acquisition of which means power and are caught in the same contradiction between professed aims and real desires as affects the whole of society.

"The world," Professor Hodges writes, "has never been fuller of high hopes and high principles than in the last hundred years. The hopes have not been realized and the principles have been ineffective. Why? Because there is a contradiction between the principles we profess and the desires by which we are actually moved. Our ideals, in which our conscious selves sincerely believe, are full of justice, humanity and peace. We believe that every human being has an inherent right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that social institutions ought to safeguard these rights and growing knowledge ought to aid their fulfilment. But our imaginations, as reflected in art and literature, in popular amusements, and in our actual behaviour, are full of something else. Our admiration and emotional attachment go to power, and to knowledge as

[1] S.C.M. Press. 1s. each. Full list of titles is contained in each pamphlet.

a source of power. This conflict between professed principles and effective archetypes is common to all the prevailing social and political movements of our time. In this respect there is no difference between liberal democracy of the Atlantic type and authoritarian communism on the Russian model. Fascism made the same professions in its public utterances, but in the inner circles it swept away the whole apparatus of ideal principles and gave itself wholly to the power archetype. In this it only said boldly what in our hearts we all partly feel. The truth of modern civilization is fascism."

WHAT SORT OF A UNIVERSITY SHOULD CHRISTIANS WORK FOR?

The conclusion reached in these pamphlets is that Christians should put all the strength they have into working for a genuinely free university. Recent events on the continent have focussed attention on the dangers of a threat to the freedom of the universities from outside, and particularly from the state. There is a growing nervousness lest the state, which in this country pays the piper nine million pounds a year in the form of grants from Parliament to the universities administered through the University Grants Committee, should soon want to call the tune. Instead of hoping that Parliament will not ask how the nation's money is spent in higher education and whether it is justified, the universities ought to be thinking in concrete and mundane terms of their relation to Parliament. It is not with an abstraction, " the state," that the universities have to deal, but with a free institution, Parliament, belonging to the same order and tradition of free institutions as the universities themselves. If we are looking for a repetition in this country of the kind of threats to freedom which the universities faced in Germany, we are looking for the wrong thing. There will be no burning of the books, no racial biology. There might be an organizational pressure in the form of a demand from the State for rapid expansion of the student body in the universities, or for concentration on certain subjects. A very present danger is that the uni-

versities might fall into an absent-minded substitution of a social machine for a free university. The genuine freedom of a university is created from within and it can be destroyed from within. Decay is a far more real menace to the genuine freedom of any free institution than attack.

THE FREE UNIVERSITY

Some of the ingredients of a free university are discussed in a further pamphlet in the same series by Miss Dorothy Emmet, *The Foundations of a Free University*. The universities have partially sold their own freedom by turning their attention away from the big problems of human life and being more and more immersed in the minutiae of the specialisms into which knowledge is subdivided.

No one sees more clearly than Ortega y Gasset, the famous Spanish philosopher, that the real task of the university is to confront men with the challenge of their time and help them to understand and meet it. A free university is a community of scholars within which every man may open his mind to a total engagement in this struggle for truth. The universities are in his phrase "living below the demands of their time", instead of living up to them. We warmly commend to our readers his lively and stimulating *Mission of the University*,[1] in which he says: "There is no denying the fact that man invariably lives according to some definite ideas which constitute the very foundation of his way of life. These ideas which I have called 'vital', meaning ideas by which an age conducts its life, are no more nor less than the repertory of our *active* convictions as to the nature of our world and our fellow creatures, convictions as to the hierarchy of the values of things—which are more to be esteemed, and which less. We are passing at present, despite certain appearances and presumptions, through an age of terrific *un-culture*. Never perhaps has the ordinary man been so far below his times and what they demand of him. Never has the civilized world so abounded in falsified, cheated lives. Almost nobody is poised squarely upon his proper and authentic place in life. Man is habituated to

[1] Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd. 7s. 6d.

living on subterfuges with which he deceives himself, conjuring up around him a very simple and arbitrary world, in spite of the admonitions of an active conscience which forces him to observe that the real world, the world that corresponds to the whole of actuality, is one of enormous complexity and grim urgency. But he is afraid—our ordinary man is timorous at heart, with all his brave gesticulations —he is afraid to admit this real world, which would make great demands on him. He prefers to falsify his life, and keep it sealed up in the cocoon of his fictitious, over-simplified concept of the world. Hence the historic importance of restoring to the university its cardinal function of 'enlightenment', the task of imparting the full culture of the time and revealing to mankind, with clarity and truthfulness, that gigantic world of to-day in which the life of the individual must be articulated, if it is to be authentic."

REINTEGRATION

Specialization has gone further in the American universities than elsewhere, and it is therefore not surprising that the question how to meet the challenge expressed in Ortega y Gasset's words has been tackled first there. The American expedient, recommended also by the Harvard report, is to provide students with "integrating courses" designed to give a conspectus of knowledge or an introduction to some of the major issues of our time. But who are the integrators? And are such courses, however good, any more than a pasting over of cracks? The sum total of human knowledge has far exceeded the power of the human mind to contain it. We must either skim the surface of a number of subjects or come to grips with one. The way ahead seems rather to lie in two things, first in progress within the specialisms, every one of which leads either to the arid pursuit of unimportant detail, or to confrontal with some real problem of life according as it is taught, and secondly, in the atmosphere of the university itself. A free university should be one in which real battles rage, where the convinced communist, atheist, humanist and Christian have freedom of utterance. The barring of the doors of

certain modern universities to the study of theology was an attempt to banish controversy, and in one sense was a blow at freedom, as were previous attempts by the Church to stop the mouths of unbelievers. Quite apart from its affect on the universities, the cause of Christianity might be greatly strengthened if it had to contend on equal terms with competing faiths and no-faiths and recover its fighting strength. Dr. Vidler develops this aspect of the question in the fifth pamphlet of the series we have mentioned, *Christianity's need for a Free University.*

THE SUPPLEMENT

Dr. Vidler uses the term " intellectual " in a sense which will include every reader of the Christian News-Letter. Dr. Vidler has been closely associated with the News-Letter from its inception and was one of the first members of its Editorial Board. He is Warden of St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, where he has made a detailed study of Mr. Gladstone's papers on which one of his most important books, *The Orb and the Cross*,[1] is based. He is the editor of *Theology.*

Kathleen Bliss

P.S. Hasty proof correction in difficult circumstances led to several mistakes in the last issue of the News-Letter. We apologize to our readers.

[1] S.P.C.K. 12s. 6d.

THE OBEDIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL

By A. R. VIDLER

THE Oxford English Dictionary defines " an intellectual " as a person possessing, or supposed to possess, superior powers of intellect. Those of whom St. Paul speaks in I Cor. xii. 8 were intellectuals : " To one is given through the Spirit the word of knowledge." In our society the class of intellectuals includes men and women who teach in universities and schools, authors and journalists, poets and artists, the members of the professions described as learned, and others in all walks of life not easily specified who live by the possession of knowledge.

We are to consider what particular things can be said about the way in which intellectuals ought to obey God and consecrate their gifts to His service, having in mind the peculiar talents which they possess and the special temptations to which they are exposed. We shall not attempt to distinguish between the different occupations in which intellectuals are engaged. The suggestions that will be made here concern the obligations and temptations which belong to intellectuals as a class. We can set them out in a series of statements about " the good Christian intellectual " accompanied by a commentary.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL IS A MEMBER OF A LOCAL CHURCH

Local church means a worshipping community which draws its members from a locality, e.g. a parish, and is therefore as mixed in its membership as the inhabitants of the locality—and not from an institution, e.g. a school, to which in the nature of the case only a section of society can belong. The idea of a local church (how far it is realized at present is another question) is that of a body of all sorts of men, women and children who happen to live in one place. The bond that unites them is their humanity, and not the fact that they do the same work, or enjoy the same recreations, or hold the same political or religious

opinions, or share the same tastes. Those things split people up into sections according to their peculiarities ; the local church binds them all together on the ground of what they have in common, namely their humanity, of which Christ is the universal Head. The local church is indeed the Body of Christ in miniature, or it is (as according to one interpretation St. Paul says in I Cor. xii. 27) *a* Body of Christ.

For this reason all good Christians recognize that it is both their obligation and their privilege to belong to a local church. But the obligation has to be particularly pressed upon the Christian intellectual because he may be tempted either by his circumstances or by his tastes to disregard it. Thus, if he is a teacher in a school or college, which has a chapel of its own, he is inclined to regard that as the centre or focus of his membership in the church, and within limits it is right that he should do so. But it is a limited and sectional kind of church membership. He ought to attach at least equal importance to the local church in whose life he can actively participate only in the holidays or during vacations, for that will bring home to him the fact that to be a Christian is to belong not to a society of scholars, but to a body of human beings. Or again, if our intellectual is an independent man of letters, he will be tempted, instead of participating in the life of the local church round the corner, to go further afield in search of a church or chapel which specially caters for him and the likes of him, and where the services and the preaching may be more agreeable or at least less offensive to his aesthetic sensibilities. If so, he will in effect be looking for a church which is a company of intellectuals, and not (what a church should be) a home for human beings.

Membership in a local church is not only of obligation for intellectuals as for other Christians, but it is calculated to do intellectuals a special kind of good. Their besetting temptation is pride ; it is their office to be critical and fastidious. They are almost bound to fancy that they are superior to the rest of mankind, a class apart or above, even though the vulgar crowd is too dull to see it. Active membership in a local church is a continual corrective of this silly, but subtle, arrogance. There the intellectual is made to realize that he is, like the factory-

worker or the farm-labourer, simply a member of the Body of Christ. Moreover, having to rub up against ordinary, non-intellectual human beings in the local church and its social life will have a wholesome and humanizing effect on the intellectual, will draw him out of refined cliques, and require him to take part in the elemental human joys and in the elemental human rows ! And again and again he will be kept humble as he realizes that very simple people often possess an intuitive wisdom, which he with all his pretensions cannot compass, and a generosity towards one another which shames his meanness towards his intellectual colleagues or competitors.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL PRAYS

Like all other men he is made for eternal life. " And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent." The knowledge of God, which by His mercy is a present possibility and a present fact, binds men together ; it is open to all ; it is intended for all. Like membership in the local church it brings men into unity, whereas the specialized knowledge of intellectuals, whether it be of mathematics or metallurgy or jurisprudence, separates them from their fellows, even from their fellow intellectuals. The knowledge of God, which unites men, is not allegiance to a theistic philosophy nor even comprehension of Christian doctrine (in these matters men must differ indefinitely), but *it is the knowledge of God* ; it is knowing the living God and the living Christ who is the mediator between God and man.

This personal or direct knowledge of God is given to men in all sorts of ways, and to some men who seldom if ever formally pray it may be given quite intimately. Nevertheless, it is normally through praying that the knowledge of God, which is eternal life, becomes articulate, conscious, definite. In the activity of prayer it grows and is enriched. The intellectual needs to pray as much as anyone else, and probably more, because his preoccupation with arguments and systems of thought, and his over-exercise of his creative or critical faculties, incline him to substitute dead or abstract idols of the intellect for personal communion with the living God. Unless he prays regularly, he may find that he knows a great deal about the arguments for the

existence of God without knowing God at all, or a great deal about the literary criticism of the Gospels without knowing Jesus Christ as the daily bearer of good news to himself.

But under modern conditions it is no easier for the average intellectual than for anyone else to find time for prayer. Intellectuals are caught up in the general busy-ness of modern society. Official duties absorb their energies; they hurry from one engagement to another; and when they are at home many of them have to spend a lot of time over domestic chores, which until a generation ago servants did for them.

These facts must be faced. They are not faced in the classical literature about prayer and the spiritual life, for the perfectly good reason that they did not then exist. It must be added that they do not seem always to be faced by contemporary preachers and writers who in their instructions and exhortations to the faithful often assume that men and women to-day could spend as much time in prayer and worship as their forefathers, if they really wanted to do so. Actually most Christian intellectuals would like to give much more time to quiet reflection than they find possible. There is no easy solution of this problem; but just because the conditions are so adverse the good Christian intellectual will consider very seriously how he can make time for personal communion with God, by having a rule to spend so many minutes in prayer daily, by observing Sunday as a day of rest and worship, and by going away each year for a retreat of some days' duration.

The intellectual should not be surprised if he finds prayer more difficult than most people do. For most people to turn aside in order to think and read and be quiet is in itself a rest and a refreshment. But the intellectual's main job is to think and read, though not always to be quiet! The point is that, unlike other people, when he prays he is using the same faculties that he is using all the time. Moreover, he is expected suddenly to turn round and to use them in an almost opposite manner. When he is not praying, he must use his mind to master his subject, he must be critical of everything that comes before him; but when he prays, he must submit his mind to be taught of God, he must listen like a child instead of laying down the

law like a scholar or an expert. These are inevitable difficulties for the intellectual, and they have not yet been sufficiently reckoned with by those who offer guidance in the art of prayer. No more than an earthly father, does God make himself known to his children according to general rules and regulations. God's dealings with every one of his children are unique, and we may be sure that he tenderly regards the peculiar difficulties of the intellectual who is in earnest.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL IS A LAY THEOLOGIAN

He does not leave theology to the professionals, but realizes that thinking out, and handing on, and applying the Christian faith is a task in which all Christians have their part to play, and that intellectuals have a special responsibility for it both because of their powers of thought and of their opportunity of helping and influencing others. This means too that he must bring the knowledge that he is acquiring in his own particular field of study or in his own section of human experience to the light of the revelation of God in Christ Jesus. He will not be content to keep his thinking in water-tight compartments, but will be trying to see everything and everybody in relation to the living God. This does not mean that he will try to force all knowledge into a logically compacted Christian system of thought. He will always respect the discipline and autonomy which are proper to each intellectual pursuit. But, while remaining aware that all human knowledge is compassed about with mystery and enigma, he will never be satisfied until he has learned how to glorify God with his intellect whatever the field of its exercise. Thus the more sure he is of God in Christ as the Lord of his existence, the more deliberately will he refuse all facile and premature solving of difficulties. Whenever he thinks he has got a question nicely and comfortably closed, he will not be surprised if the Holy Spirit opens it up again, and in so doing teaches him that there is for the intellectual a way of the cross which he must learn to follow to the end.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL IS A RECONCILER

He knows how little he yet knows of all that there is to be known, and therefore he will always be ready to learn from

others. Moreover, he knows that the living God is speaking to all men, whether or not they listen and obey, and he can set no limit to what God may be designing to teach him through other people. It is his calling to recognize and acknowledge truth through whatever channel it comes. He will resist the absurd notion that his own system of thought is finally and exclusively true, and will always be seeking to enlarge and deepen his understanding by listening to what others have to say. He will be particularly eager to learn from sincere men who are opposed to him, for he will suspect that, whatever superstructure they have erected on it, they have at bottom got hold of some principle the truth of which it is blasphemy to deny.

It is in fact the work of the good Christian intellectual to bring men and principles into unity, to break down the barriers of misunderstanding between man-made systems and exclusive schools of thought, and never to abandon the path of reconciliation. The Church ought to be the place where the upholders of all true principles meet and are at home. Wherever this drawing men together in the truth which transcends their partial understandings of it is going on, there Christ is at work, even if He is not openly acknowledged, and He can be relied on to bless His poor intellectuals who are unremitting in this work. On the negative side, it means that the good Christian intellectual will avoid quick and harsh judgments, will abhor arrogance in himself more than in anyone else, and will be an impossible person in any group which expects its members to follow a strict party line. He is tolerant not because he regards all opinions as doubtful, but because he is sure that God is at work in His world leading all men into the truth.

THE GOOD CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL IS A PASTOR

He cares more for persons than for ideas or parties or causes. He has constantly to be watching himself about this, for his capacity for abstract thought and his interest in classifying people as well as things are liable to make him blind to the primacy of the personal. But after all it is persons who matter in the end, who matter to God, and who should matter to him. There is no lack of good ideas in the world to-day, nor of organizations to propagate them, but there is a terrible lack of pastors, or of

"guides, philosophers and friends". By pastors we mean men or women who care for other people as persons, and who are willing to put all their capacity for sympathy and understanding at the disposal of others not in order to control, dominate or regiment them, but in order to help them to solve their own problems and answer their own questions.

Ministering to the flock of Christ is a good work to which all Christians (and not only the ordained ministry) are called according to their opportunities, and intellectuals have gifts and opportunities for it which others lack. The flock of Christ embraces not only members of the Church or professing Christians but all mankind, and not least the scattered and lost sheep. Owing to the intellectual confusion of this age, the decay of traditional assurances, the perils and anxieties that beset all considering men, the sense of impasse which weighs upon all who have taken the measure of the blatant propaganda of conflicting ideologies, it is not in the least strange that there should be a very large number of men and women who are perplexed, frustrated, profoundly fearful. These are not the only scattered and lost sheep of Christ, but it is to these that Christian intellectuals owe a special ministry.

Everywhere the Good Shepherd wills to make use of under-shepherds, and here above all He wants under-shepherds who will lead and not drive, under-shepherds through whom He may know His sheep and they may know Him. The good Christian intellectual will hardly be able to help here, unless he has himself experienced the perplexities and fears of the disillusioned, unless he has really had to struggle for his faith. Then he will know that what is demanded of him is not the lofty exposition of an intellectual panacea, but a lowly readiness to enter into the doubts of others and a desire to see them, not accept his point of view, but move towards the light from where they are and only by such steps as they can honestly take. This is to say that he is not a master who wants to gather a company of disciples round himself, not a pundit who airily or aggressively dictates solutions, but a pastor who is eager, wherever he is allowed and encouraged, to help men to find their own way through their own intellectual and personal problems.

Very often, however, a sense of sheer inability to help will come upon him, and this will send him to his prayers with a fresh urgency and compassion. Thus he has to learn that it is impossible to be a good pastor without being a strong intercessor. He has to learn the meaning and the cost of the ministry of intercession; no man can succour his brethren who is not himself being succoured by the High Priest of the race. It is only in Christ, the Head of humanity, that men can come home to God. In him men are already bound to each other and can succour each other. It is the pastor who daily identifies himself with the universal intercession of the great High Priest who will be most serviceable to the Good Shepherd who is always seeking his lost sheep.

This sketch of the good Christian intellectual is obviously an ideal; it amounts to a counsel of perfection. But it is by no means a mere ideal, having no relation to actual possibilities. On the contrary, we have known men and women who through the power of the Spirit have been enabled to manifest these characteristics to a wonderful degree. Are they not aims which everyone, to whom the word of wisdom or of knowledge has been given, must keep constantly in view if he is to practise the obedience of a Christian man and to fulfil the particular form of ministry to which he has been called in the Body of Christ?

Minimum Subscriptions—12s. 6d. ($3.00 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year. 6s. 6d. for six months (Great Britain and Ireland only). Single copies, 6d.; reduction for quantities.

Bound Volumes—Vols. II—X (May 1940—Dec. 1945) 8s. 6d. post free, or 7s. 6d. in sets of four or more consecutive volumes.

Groups—Special rates for group subscriptions may be had on application.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20 BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W. 1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Christian Frontier Council, and printed in Great Britain by the Church Army Press, Cowley, Oxford.